Sub-Committee Report on Pre-enrollment Program

Structure of Program

Schedule

The program lasted three and a half weeks (25 days). This schedule represents an expansion of two to three days over the previous summer programs. The additional days were added to provide a period for student-faculty evaluations. This evaluative process was two fold: first to allow the professors to review student's class performance and second, to make advising recommendations for fall course selections.

Classes meet daily, Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. till 12:30 p.m. with one half hour break. Each class met a minimum of four hours per week, and as many as seven hours per week (study skills). Except for the study skills course, there were at least four hours per week of homework assigned for each class -- there were four classes per week and therefore 36 hours of course work per week.

There were each a math, English, social science seminar and study skills course. These courses are discussed in greater detail in Part II of this section. These particular courses were selected with two goals in mind: 1) to provide a framework in which basic skills (math and gram) could be improved, with a view towards developing effective written communication skills, and helping students assess their competency in math, and 2) to simulate the rigorousness of a typical Middlebury term curriculum in which students are expected to quickly adjust from one subject and one professor to the next and to monitor their own class, homework and personal time.

Faculty

All classes were taught by full-time members of the College faculty except the study skills course which was taught by an outside consultant. During one study skills class, relaxation and meditation exercises were taught by an associate of the consultant. This experience proved extremely popular with the students.

Student Assistants

The five program assistants were students from the sophomore and junior classes. Their tasks were to tutor program participants, assist faculty in the classroom, lead review sessions, plan and implement social activities. They lived in the dormitory with participants, and thus realized such supportive roles as dorm advisor and peer counselor.

Participants

The broad diversity of this group greatly distinguishes it from its preceeding sister program. The 22 participants represented the following composite: 13 white, 7 black, 1 Hispanic and 1 foreign student. Because of their late admissions, 2 black students who were excellent candidates for the program did not attend. One black student deferred admission and therefore did not participate. Diversification was also evidenced regionally as students came from Texas, Michigan, Missouri, Quebec, Haiti and China.

Activities

The program traditionally opens on Saturday with a dinner for students, their parents and faculty. Outings were scheduled for the three Saturdays which included: a nature walk, a cultural outing, and a day in Montreal. In addition, a couple of lake trips were scheduled, but finally, only two outings were possible due to inclement weather.

Cost

All students participated in the program free of charge as in previous years. Those on financial aid received $200 ~~adjustments~~ reductions on their summer, self-help requirement. Program assistants received a modest salary and room and board. The costs of the program approximated $11,000, half of which went towards board charges.

Recommendations

Given the total structure of the program, the current three and a half weeks schedule felt comfortable for most participants. There were, however, suggestions to lengthen it (as for some it was "too much, too fast"), or to end it after three weeks (to accommodate a longer break before Freshman week).

The Committee finds the schedule appropriate to the goals of the program. It provides adequate time to reinforce learned skills and for the introduction to new disciplines in the context of an intense learning experience. The possibility of expanding the program is an unlikely one due to the structure of the Summer Language Schools.

Classes/faculty

While most participants were satisfied with the format [illegible] of grammar and math classes -- requesting only that more practice in developing written skills be provided -- there was criticism surrounding the format of the seminar component and the presentation of the study skills course.

Differences in personal interests account for much of this criticism. For example, students either loved or hated economics,

responding not on the style and techniques of presenting this new discipline but on gut level reactions to the discipline. Some were extremely curious about the development of the theme, "economics and human behavior", suggesting that a different topic may have had more general appeal. Other suggestions were that one professor cover a topic from several perspectives, or that two, not three, professors approach a theme from their disciplines. The Committee is satisfied with the overall outcome of the seminar experience, recognizing the tendency of this group of adolescents to initially react unfavorably to new systems and ideas. Nearly all students thought this learning experience provided excellent preparation for fall courses, having required them to learn to quickly adjust to different teaching modes and topics, different methods of testing and grading and to approach faculty regarding academic issues.

The Committee recommends, however, to attempt where possible to solicit input from students regarding a theme. The number of disciplines and faculty represented would be dictated by the goal of the seminar, though it is our opinion that not more than three disciplines be covered given the current program schedule.

On the suggestion of the participants, the Committee recommends the continuation of a study skills course conducted under a different approach. The Putney Reading Institute is currently under consideration.

Finally, the Committee recommends the inclusion of a writing component in conjunction with the grammar course or as an additional course, possibly taught by someone from the College writing clinic.

Assistants

Program assistants were viewed as helpful and friendly liasons to the general student body and the administration. One excellent suggestion is that they play a larger role in course advising, i.e. defining and interpreting course descriptions in the fall catalogue. This is an important area of advising that students thought was given little attention. Also, the assistants thought their roles could be more productively realized if they could know earlier the specific courses they will be required to tutor.

Participants

Participants responded positively and enthusiastically to the social diversity of the group, one commenting, "This was the most diverse group I've ever been involved with. It was great for me since the high school I went to was all white, middle-class, country bumpkins. It was good for me to be exposed to a wider spectrum of people." The Committee is very pleased with the level of diversity represented in this past year's group, recommending only that more effort be directed towards involving more white students who have academic weaknesses.

Activities

Students had mixed feelings about activities, often feeling unhappy that they were required to attend outings. "The program had a camp quality; there could have been more independence", wrote one participant. However the program coordinator considers shared play-time an important dimension of the residential learning experience and thinks that three scheduled outings are not excessive. An effort can be made though to provide more optional activities on Sundays, and some afternoons.

Cost

Developing methods of curtailing costs without jeopardizing quality of services is an important concern of the program coordinator. The Committee supports this interest and her recommendation that the entire program continue to be free of charge to financial aid students and that others be charged for books and board were appropriate.

Grades

There was a clear decline in the level of motivation once students learned that grades would not be entered on their transcripts. While this revelation had little effect on the desire of some to maximize the benefits of this learning experience, several others strongly urge us to create some method of credit or an otherwise incentive. The program faculty discussed this issue at length, and recognizing the improbability of securing faculty support for accrediting this program, had few suggestions for resolving this problem.

Evaluation

A system should be established which periodically evaluates this program. It is evident that the backgrounds and needs of the traditional participants of this program are changing more quickly than in past years, such that 10 years should never be allowed to lapse between program reviews.